

# Engagement in actions beyond basic professional duties – measurement and correlates

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## Abstract

**Objective.** The main purpose of the paper was to present the construct of engagement in actions beyond basic professional duties (shortly: beyond-duties engagement) and its measurement with the modified version of the UWES-9 questionnaire. An additional goal was to find differences in this type of employee engagement depending on personal variables, and the relationship between it and feedback from others, organizational commitment and burnout.

**Methods.** A preliminary study was conducted within 61 employees (77% of men) of a medium-sized company in the automatics-robotics industry. In the main study 137 employees (60% of women) of private and state-owned enterprises of various industries with minimum 2 years work experience in one company took part. In the second study the Feedback scale from the Work Design Questionnaire, Organizational Commitment Scale, and Oldenburg Burnout Inventory were used.

**Results.** It was found that the modified UWES-9 questionnaire to measure beyond-duties engagement is a one-factor, reliable and theoretically valid measure. The higher level of engagement in actions in leadership positions was established, as well as its positive relationship with feedback from others and organizational commitment, and negative relationship with burnout.

**Conclusions.** Engagement in actions beyond basic professional duties is a homogenous construct, linked to positive aspects of work. Every employee may engage in additional activities, although working as a manager may be conducive to greater beyond-duties engagement.

**Limitations.** There was rather small, inhomogeneous group in the main study, in both studies only self-description methods were used.

**Keywords.** engagement in action; beyond-duties engagement; work engagement; UWES questionnaire

<https://doi.org/10.5817/CZ.MUNI.P210-9488-2019-2>

## Introduction

Employee engagement is one of the few constructs that arouses great interest among both scientists and practitioners of work and organizational psychology for almost three decades (Saks & Gruman, 2014). There are many approaches and definitions of engagement and even names that define the phenomenon itself, e.g.: employee engagement, job engagement (Roberts & Davenport, 2002) and work engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). Two approaches can be considered as dominant in terms of defining. Historically, Kahn (1990, p. 694) defined engagement first as "the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances". Engagement is also associated with a psychological presence while fulfilling someone's professional role. This concept, however, was rarely used for the first 20 years, as indicated by its few quotations (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Concepts that contrast the engagement with burnout gained greater popularity. Maslach and colleagues (2001) described engagement as characterized by energy, cooperation and effectiveness, which are the opposition to the three dimensions of burnout. Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá and Bakker (2002, p. 74) developed this approach, claiming that engagement is a separate construct defined as a "positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption". Vigor is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work, and persistence even in the face of difficulties. Dedication is understood as a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge. Absorption includes being fully concentrated and deeply engrossed in one's work and having difficulties in detaching oneself from work.

Both approaches to engagement have some common points, although they differ to a large extent. Kahn's concept is more comprehensive because it includes the concept of personal action and agentic self (Cole, Walter, Bedeian & O'Boyle, 2012), it is also more expressive and unique as it refers to the fusion of the whole person (on physical, emotional and cognitive levels) with their professional role (Saks & Gruman, 2014). In the approach of Schaufeli and colleagues (2002), although engagement is concerned as a separate construct in relation to other, similar ones, such as job satisfaction or organizational commitment, it is too similar to the concept of burnout as its opposition (Cole et al., 2012; Crawford, LePine & Rich, 2010), and less comprehensive compared to the Kahn concept. On the other hand, the difficulty in applying the Kahn concept in scientific research is the lack of a universally recognized and satisfactory psychometric tool for measuring such perceived employee involvement, although such attempts have already been made (see Crawford et al., 2010; Soane et al., 2012).

The interest in employees' engagement results from the observations and empirical reports indicating that it contributes to the development of employees, as well as it brings tangible benefits to employing them organizations (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2008). As shown by Salanova, Del Libano, Llorens & Schaufeli (2014), engaged employees are characterized by a high level of energy to work, a sense of job satisfaction and a belief that their work is an interesting challenge. They also experience a high sense of control in their work, have sufficient competence to do it well and are attached to the organization. Other authors (e.g. Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2008) show in their research that engaged employees

are characterized by better mental health (positive emotionality) and physical health, initiative, proactive behavior and motivation to learn ; they are also more creative, effective and more willing to do things that go beyond basic duties, which is a work challenge. The meta-analysis of correlates of engagement showed that its dimensions are positively linked to job resources, such as social support, autonomy, feedback and self-efficacy; work engagement is also positively related to positive work results, such as commitment to the organization or health status, and negatively to negative work results, such as burnout or the intention to leave work (Halbesleben, 2010). In organizations with engaged employees, financial turnover is increased, staff fluctuation is reduced (especially talented employees) and expenses related to marketing and other management tools are decreased (Szabowska-Walaszczyk, 2010). It should also be pointed out that work engagement is a state much more strongly connected with the results and behaviors of employees in comparison to other similar states, such as job satisfaction or organizational commitment (see: Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011). Some studies show (e.g. Shukla, Adhikari & Singh, 2015; Robinson, Hooker & Hayday, 2007), that employee engagement is connected also with individual variables, like age, gender, education or job role.

The tendency of the engaged employees to undertake additional tasks on their own initiative seems particularly important from the point of view of the employer. As shown in the daily diary studies by Sonnentag (2003), the daily level of employee engagement allows predicting proactive behavior. Other studies have shown that the proactive generation of goals by employees was a strong factor predicting their innovative behaviors in individual work (Odoardi, 2015).

In connection with the above-mentioned findings, it may be important to examine the phenomenon of employee engagement in actions beyond basic professional duties (also known as beyond-duties engagement). Engagement understood in this way concerns the thoughts, emotions and behaviors related to taking action at work on the own initiative of the person and includes activities that do not result from the basic work requirements of the organization in which they are undertaken. Beyond-duties engagement is rather a long-lasting state of mind in which a person undertakes goal-oriented activities and continues them regardless of the difficulties and alternative aspirations encountered.

We were interested in how the engagement in actions beyond basic professional duties is associated with personal variables, like age, gender, education and level of position held, with work resources such as feedback from others, positive states such as organizational commitment and negative states such as burnout. Because there is no method to measure the beyond-duties engagement, it was decided to modify the instructions for the respondents and individual items in the UWES-9 questionnaire (*Utrecht Work Engagement Scale*) by Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova (2006), one of the most popular tools to measure work engagement.

As a consequence, the main objective of the undertaken research was to validate the modified version of the UWES-PL-9 questionnaire to measure engagement in actions beyond basic professional duties. An additional goal was to find answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the differences in the scope of engagement in actions beyond basic professional duties of employees depending on personal variables, such as age, gender,

- education, level of position held?
2. What are the links between beyond-duties engagement and feedback from others, organizational commitment and burnout?

## **Method**

### **Participants and Procedure**

The research was carried out on-line in two stages. To the preliminary study all employees of one the mid-range company from the automation and robotics industry were invited, from whom 61 employees (77% of men) aged between 25 and 50 years participated in the study ( $M = 37.71$ ,  $SD = 7.48$ ). The majority of them had a Master's degree (80%) and held a specialist position (69%). The invitation along with a link to the questionnaires was sent to the company's HR director, who then sent them to all employees. The main study was conducted among employees of private and state enterprises from various industries, located mainly in southern Poland. The criterion for selection to the group was a minimum two-year work experience in a given company, which seems sufficient for a person to be able to commit to the organization that employs them. The invitation, together with a link to the questionnaires, was sent to various organizations from the researchers' database. 164 people took part in the study, but due to lack of data or failure to meet the criterion, the analysis included 137 employees (82 women and 55 men) between 23 and 67 years old ( $M = 38.25$ ,  $SD = 10.06$ ). The majority of them (60%) had a Master's degree, then post-graduate (18%), Bachelor's degree (11%), secondary education (6%) and vocational education (5%). Most of the respondents (48%) held a specialist position, the remaining managerial (37%) or administrative (15%) positions. The seniority of the respondents in the current company ranged between 2 and 31 years ( $M = 8.98$ ,  $SD = 6.82$ ).

### **Measures**

In order to measure the dependent variable, a modified version of the UWES Questionnaire (Utrecht Work Engagement Scale) by Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova (2006) was used in the Polish adaptation of Szabowska-Walaszczyk, Zawadzka and Wojtaś (2011). The scale consists of 9 statements assessed by respondents on the 7-point Likert scale (0 - "never", 6 - "always"). The reliability of the Polish version of the UWES, determined by the Cronbach's alpha internal consistency indicator, was .94. In the modified version, the instruction in the manual: The following statements relate to your well-being at work has been replaced: The following statements relate to your well-being when performing activities that go beyond basic professional duties - those that do not result from the basic scope of work responsibilities in your organization. In contrast, in the content of the statements all the words "work", "I work", were replaced by the words "action", "I act." Prior to the research, the intelligibility of the contents of the instructions and items with two psychologists and two non-academic persons were consulted.

In order to check the psychometric properties of the modified version of the UWES-PL-

9 questionnaire, the indicators of internal consistency of the questionnaire and the discriminating power of individual items were calculated. The theoretical validity of the tool was verified by means of exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. In order to obtain answers to the second research questions, the following tools were used:

1. The scale of feedback from others taken from the Work Design Questionnaire (WDQ) by Morgeson and Humphrey (2006) in the Polish adaptation of Malinowska and Tokarz. The scale contains three statements rated by the respondents on the 5-point Likert scale (1 - "I strongly disagree", 5 - "strongly agree"). The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient for the original scale was .88. For the needs of the described research, the word "work" was replaced by the word "action".

2. The Organizational Commitment Scale (OCS) by Meyer and Allen (1997) in the Polish adaptation of Bańka, Basińska and Wołowska (2002). The questionnaire consists of 18 items forming three scales: affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment (6 items on each scale). Items are evaluated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 - "strongly disagree", 7 - "strongly agree"). In the Polish adaptation of the scale, Cronbach's *alpha* coefficient for the affective commitment subscale was .84, for the normative commitment subscale .78, and for the continuance commitment subscale .77.

3. Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI) by Demerouti and Bakker (2008) in the Polish adaptation of Baka and Basińska (2016). The questionnaire consists of 16 statements and two 8-item subscales: exhaustion and distance from work. Respondents mark the answers on the 4-point Likert scale (1 - "agree"; 4 - "do not agree"). In the Polish adaptation of the scale, Cronbach's *alpha* coefficient for the exhaustion subscale was .73, and for the distance from work subscale .69.

## **Results**

### **Factor validity analysis**

In order to verify the factor structure of the questionnaire, in the first step exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with VARIMAX rotation was performed (preliminary study). At the beginning, a scree plot was made, which showed a clearly univariate structure of the modified UWES-9 questionnaire. The 1-factor model was then tested (see Table 1). Factor loads show the dominance of one factor, despite the relatively low load of the ninth item.

In the second step, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed (main study). The calculations were performed only for the 1-factor model (see Table 2), as it was not possible to estimate data for the 2- and 3-factor model. The obtained values indicate a moderately good fit of the model to the data (RMSEA = .109, CFI = .913, SRMR = .054). Factor loadings are presented in Table 1. The structure obtained is consistent with the validation analysis of the Polish adaptation of the UWES questionnaire.

**Table 1.** The loads values of exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis of the modified UWES-9

UWES-9 items	Factor 1 (EFA, N = 61)	Factor 1 (CFA, N = 137)
1. When I act, I feel bursting with energy.	.689	.698
2. While acting, I feel strong and vigorous.	.756	.758
3. I am enthusiastic about my actions at work.	.618	.601
4. My actions inspires me.	.730	.734
5. When I get up in the morning, I feel like taking those actions.	.713	.716
6. I feel happy when I am acting intensely.	.769	.777
7. I am proud of the actions that I take.	.687	.692
8. I am immersed in my actions.	.624	.597
9. I get carried away when I am acting.	.409	.410

**Table 2.** Confirmatory factor analysis coefficients of modified UWES-9

Coefficients	chi <sup>2</sup>	df	RMSEA A	CFI	SRMR
1-factor model	71.18	27	.109	.913	.054

*Note.* N = 137, df – degrees of freedom, RMSEA - root means square error of approximation; CFI - comparative fit index; SRMR - standardized root mean square residual;  $p < .001$ .

### External validity analysis

To assess the theoretical validity of the modified version of the UWES questionnaire, and at the same time to answer the second of the research questions posed, three criteria variables were selected: feedback from others; organizational commitment with its three components: affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment; job burnout with its two components: exhaustion and distance from work. It was expected that engagement in actions beyond basic professional duties would positively correlate with feedback and affective and normative commitment and negatively correlate with continuance commitment and two components of job burnout.

Correlation analysis results confirmed almost all predictions (see Table 3). Significant positive correlations of beyond-duties engagement with feedback from others ( $r = .28$ ), affective commitment ( $r = .35$ ) and normative commitment ( $r = .31$ ) and negative correlations with exhaustion ( $r = -.30$ ) and distance from work ( $r = -.42$ ) were demonstrated. Only the relationship with continuance commitment turned out to be close to zero and insignificant.

**Table 3.** *Correlations between engagement in actions and related variables*

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. Engagement in action	-						
2. Feedback	.28*	-					
3. Affective commitment	.36*	.12	-				
4. Continuance commitment	-.06	-.17	.35*	-			
5. Normative commitment	.31*	.04	.70*	.24*	-		
6. Exhaustion	-.30*	-.12	-.23*	.18*	-.25*	-	
7. Distance from work	-.42*	-.14	-.60*	-.05	-.50*	.33*	-

Note. \*p < 0.05

### Reliability analysis

The reliability of the questionnaire was estimated using the internal consistency method, using the Cronbach's *alpha* coefficient. Statistical analysis (see Table 4) showed that individual items correlated quite high, reaching a total correlation coefficient between .57 and .73, except for the ninth item, whose total correlation coefficient was .38. The discriminating power of individual items was between .85 and .88. Cronbach's *alpha* coefficient for the entire scale was .87 (N = 137, M = 37.97, SD = 6.82), which indicates a fairly high reliability of the questionnaire.

**Table 4.** *Descriptive statistics and reliability coefficients of UWES-9*

UWES-9 items	M	S	Item-total correlation	Discriminatory power of items
1. When I act, I feel bursting with energy.	37.68	6.14	.62	.86
2. While acting, I feel strong and vigorous.	36.23	6.02	.70	.85
3. I am enthusiastic about my actions at work.	38.24	6.18	.58	.86
4. My actions inspires me.	35.68	5.97	.69	.85
5. When I get up in the morning, I feel like taking those actions.	36.93	6.08	.65	.85
6. I feel happy when I am acting intensely.	35.89	5.99	.73	.85
7. I am proud of the actions that I take.	36.86	6.07	.63	.85
8. I am immersed in my actions.	37.98	6.16	.58	.86
9. I get carried away when I am acting.	37.87	6.15	.38	.88

In order to obtain the answer to the first research question, the following analyzes were performed: student's t-test for independent groups to determine if there are differences in the dependent variable between women and men; correlation of r-Person in order to find a relation

between the age of employees and the dependent variable; one-way ANOVA variance analysis, to capture differences in the scope of a dependent variable in employees with different education and occupying positions at different levels.

The research results did not show differences in the level of engagement in actions beyond basic professional duties of people of different ages, different gender and education. Significant differences occurred only in terms of the type of position held ( $F(2, 134) = 5.69, p < .005$ ): managers were characterized by a higher degree of beyond-duties engagement ( $MM = 40.72$ ) than specialists ( $MS = 37.0$ ) and administrative employees ( $MA = 36.5$ ).

## Discussion

In this study we analyzed the construct of engagement in actions beyond professional duties which was introduced to capture the employees' motivation to extra-role behaviors. We see it as a psychological gradual process that includes physical-energetic, cognitive and emotional aspects directed towards activities that do not result from the basic work requirements of the organization in which they are undertaken. Thus, our conceptualization differs from previous construct such as proactive behavior, personal initiative and contextual performance which are focused solely on behaviors. Referring to the main objective of the research, which was the validation of a modified version of the UWES-PL-9 questionnaire to measure engagement in actions beyond basic professional duties, it can be concluded that it is a reliable tool. The reliability coefficient was quite high and not much lower than the Polish adaptation of the original version.

Analysis of the factorial validity of the modified UWES-9 questionnaire confirmed its accuracy, although to a limited extent. The obtained one-factor structure is consistent with the Polish adaptation of the original version of this tool, however, it does not coincide with the Dutch version of the questionnaire (Schaufeli et al., 2006), the level of matching the one-factor model to the data is also weak. The results obtained can be explained in two ways. Firstly, a number of previous studies carried out in different countries did not confirm the three-fold structure of the UWES questionnaire: sometimes it was one factor, sometimes two (Mills, Culbertson & Fullagar, 2012). This may be due to cultural differences reflected in a different approach to work in the Netherlands and other Western countries, and Eastern European countries where one goes to work primarily because of economic reasons, and proactivity is not necessarily a value. Secondly, the research group in the main study was very diverse. The respondents shared only a minimum of two years of professional experience, but differed in age (23–67 years), actual professional experience (between 2 and 31 years), type and size of enterprise (state or private), and industry. Considering the differences in the experience of these people, one can presume that their understanding of activities that go beyond basic professional duties may be different, consequently it can have impact on the difficulties to obtain the original factor structure. Thus, it is worth to carry out further research with a modified version of the UWES-9 questionnaire on more homogenous group.

Referring to the first research question, the research results showed that there are no significant differences in the scope of beyond-duties engagement of employees depending on



personal variables such as age, gender and education. Differences appeared only in the type of position held; for managers this level was significantly higher. This may lead to the conclusion that rather non-personal variables are responsible for the variance of results, e.g. characteristics of the working environment. It can be also concluded that personal benefits resulting from engaging in additional activities at work are achievable at every stage of professional life, although working as a manager may be conducive to greater engagement in the undertaken activities. This issue can be explained in two ways. First, the work of the manager is associated with greater opportunities for self-fulfillment, as it requires the possession and use of more competences (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Secondly, having responsibility and control naturally increases motivation to work (Gick & Tarczyńska, 1999).

While answering the second research question, it turned out that beyond-duties engagement is positively related to affective and normative organizational commitment and received feedback from others and negatively with burnout dimensions. The results obtained show that people who are more engaged beyond their duties are also more emotionally and normatively committed to their organization, and vice versa, due to the correlation nature of the analyzed relationship. Considering the lack of a statistically significant correlation with continuance commitment, these results show that employees engaged in actions beyond basic professional duties are optimally committed to their organization. Employees with a high level of engagement in actions beyond basic professional duties have a positive attitude towards the organization employing them. The basis of their commitment is not the inability to find another job, but the emotional bond with the organization and its members, and the desire to work in it because of a sense of commitment. The result regarding the positive relationship between feedback from others and the analyzed construct can be interpreted in relation to the function of this resource at work. Similarly to the work engagement (Bakker, 2011), it can act as a stimulus for beyond-duties engagement. On the other hand, a positive correlation between engagement in actions beyond basic professional duties and feedback may indicate that such employees may themselves look for information on the quality of their work. Other research (see Baka & Basińska, 2016) confirm the negative relationship of work engagement and burnout. It can therefore be assumed that this should be similar to the beyond-duties engagement. This relationship also indicates that people engaged in additional activities do not feel overloaded with their duties, and that the difficulties they encounter at work may be treated by them more as challenges than obstacles on the path of their professional development. On this basis, it is possible to conclude about better professional adaptation and personal functioning of people with a high level of engagement in actions beyond basic professional duties.

In addition to their strengths, the research also has its weaknesses. Only two cross-sectional studies were performed on relatively small groups of employees, using only self-description methods. In the future, it would be worth repeating the research on larger, more homogeneous groups of employees, using also objective data on the effectiveness of employees engaged beyond their duties. It would also be interesting to check the relationship of engagement in actions beyond professional duties with other job demands and resources.

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